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ABSTRACT

Student participation during and subsequent to an ethnographic study of peer collaboration in a primary classroom is explored through a long-term investigation. The original study was designed to study patterns of collaboration using a variety of techniques including interviews with the children, first seen in a split grade one and grade two classroom. Interviews illustrate how capable the children were, even at a young age, of providing insight and interpretation by reflecting on classroom activities. Children were presented with the data, including videotapes, after 1 year, and when they were in grade six. Eight of the original 15 students saw the early videotapes and commented on their behavior and collaborative patterns. Results indicate that children can be excellent contributors to the research pattern even at a young age, and that videotaped data provide a wonderful way for examining events retrospectively. Rather than merely having children participate in the validation of interpretations, researchers might consider having them involved in the framing and directing of questions from the beginning of research. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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ACTION RESEARCH: INCORPORATING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN

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Over the last decade, educators have made great strides in promoting the notion of action research. The term action research is attributed to Lewin (1948). The thrust of his work was the need to study the conditions and effects of social action that would ultimately lead to social change. This type of research gained substantial prominence at the Lawrence Stenhouse Center for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia in the 1970's. Similar research directions have been perpetuated as teacher-researcher collaborative work (Cochran-Smith, 1990), teacher-as-researcher projects (Goswami & Stillman, 1987) and interest in reflective practice (Schon, 1983). However, all strands seek to build on the interests, ideas and interpretations of practitioners in their contexts and to disseminate the results in ways that are accessible and relevant, thus demystifying and democratizing educational research (Hymes, 1974). The work of sociolinguists over the past twenty years, which has recognized the importance of studying and describing in rich detail, the interactions of participants in their natural settings, and to involve the participants in interpreting the results (Heath, 1983; Mehan, 1979) has contributed to the development of this trend. Methods of qualitative inquiry have been adapted to produce clearer and deeper understandings of classroom processes. In so doing, teachers and students have become integral participants in the research. As a result they have been empowered and have often created new and exciting dimensions of interacting (Medway, 1987; Newman, 1991). Only very recently, however, have

> ...the perspectives and thought processes of the children themselves been a significant arena for investigation... Research in which investigators actually talked to children, eliciting from them their own points of view and using those points of view to frame the research are even more recent. (LeCompte & Preissle, 853).

The point of this paper is to focus upon student involvement

during and subsequent to an ethnographic study of peer collaboration in a primary classroom. While the original work began as a qualitative study which I conducted from a university perspective, (Butler-Kisber, 1988), the nature of the data collection, the analysis and the particular context produced significant collaboration between the teacher and myself and proved to be conducive to some important, longterm participation with the children.

What I will attempt to illustrate is that if we hope to make strides in educational research that will contribute to change and empowerment in the teaching profession, action research must be developed in ways which seek to seriously incorporate not only teacher voices but also those of students. To do this I will situate the current work in terms of the original study and then show how the involvement of these children over time has convinced me of their ability to contribute to, and our need to include them in the research process.

In the original year-long study of peer collaboration around educational tasks in a split grade one and two classroom, the project was designed to delineate ethnographically, patterns of collaboration using fieldnotes, audio and videotaped recordings of interaction, artifact collection techniques as well as in-depth interviews with the teacher, Marj Phillips. In addition, some interviews with the children were planned. The inclusion of both Marj and children in the interview process was to ensure the perspectives of the participants would be represented. The interviews with Marj, more appropriately called dialogues, have been, and continue to be invaluable. Our relationship has developed into a long-standing, collaborative one and merits a full discussion at another time.

What became apparent after I conducted individual interviews with the children, midway through the study, was that they were

very capable, even at this young age, of providing insights and interpretations by reflecting upon what was happening in their classroom. Consequently, in June 1986 when my year in their classroom was almost over, small groups of children were shown videotaped excerpts of patterns that were emerging from the data and asked to respond. Their reactions were also videotaped, transcribed and used as aditional data in the fine-grained analysis that ensued the subsequent year.

The information that these children provided helped to corroborate and question interpretations that Marj and I had. Their insights sometimes simplified or modified our focus. As a result, and with Marj's help, since the children were no longer in her classroom, in June 1987, I had them revisit samples of the data to validate and finalize the results of the study. Details of this work have been described at great length elsewhere (Butler-Kisber, 1988). However, it is worthy to note that they were able to define collaboration, describe and delineate different patterns of collaboration and present the advantages and disadvantages of working with peers in the classroom. Interestingly, as will be shown later, they highlighted the importance of friendship. In comparing the videotaped transcriptions of 1986 and 1987, it was apparent that their interpretations remained consistent even after the interval of a year.

My evolving interest in action research and ongoing reflection continued to heighten my appreciation of the children's contribution. Their involvement and yet growing distance from the original data in both time and age seemed to offer a unique way of returning to the patterns of interaction that emerged from the earlier study and of examining them with more "theoretical sensitivity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Increasingly, I felt the need to return to these collaborative patterns and overall collaborative nature of Marj Phillip's class which in many ways contrast strikingly with the co-operative learning techniques being

adopted in a substantial number of classrooms in our local school boards. My reservations about the wholesale implementation of "co-operative learning" are echoed in the work of Florio-Ruane when she suggests that it is not the techniques or strategies that make the difference in classroom learning but rather the provision of "conditions under which social life serves to support intellectual development." (1991, 383).

My interest in conducting a retrospective examination of the original data was, therefore, twofold. I hoped to describe and understand more fully how children could contribute to qualitative classroom research. Also, I hypothesized that by expanding the boundaries of the original study with respect to time and perspective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), it might be possible to see this collaborative classroom in refined and/or potentially new ways. However, I must emphasize that to realize such a retrospective was predicated on having videotaped data (Erikson, 1992). As well, the implementation was contingent on the relationship which had developed with Marj. It was she who facilitated locating the children and obtaining the permission for their participation and who has continued to contribute to this work.

On a hot summer day in June of 1991, 8 grade six students of the original 15 grade one children entered a small, carpetted and uncluttered previewing room in Bellevue School in Cassonville, a suburb of Montreal. They converged at the entrance laughing and physically nudging each other playfully as they assumed seats that were situated in a semi-circle around a VHS playback machine and monitor. It was a unique moment for me after the many long hours of watching them intensely on videotape over the years. I had came to feel that I knew them very well (in fact to this day I do not know their last names). For this reason, in spite of time, they were all easily recognizable. On the other hand their size and maturity contrasted sharply with that of these former six year olds and

profoundly underscored the speed with which the reel of life spins. For the first few minutes they giggled and squirmed in response to seeing themselves in circle-time some five years earlier. However, as the seconds ticked by, the rustling and whispering subsided and increasingly over the next two days and 18 videotape excerpts later, the ebb and flow of selfconsciousness diminished as they became engaged and engrossed in reflections and responses.

The retrospective process

The relatively small attrition rate at this low to middle income school and the stable teacher population (Marj Phillips retired a year ago after teaching there for 20 years), facilitated contacting the remaining 8 (5 boys and 3 girls) of the original 15 grade one children (9 boys and 6 girls) and made the task of getting permission to work with the children an easy one. (It should be noted that the grade two children of that class have also been involved at a separate time in the same type of process and the two sets of data will ultimately be integrated).

In preparation for the interviews, I reviewed the original videotapes and selected a sampling of 18 excerpts based on clarity, original participants (I chose excerpts in which at least some of the 8 children were participants) and representativeness of the patterns of peer-peer, teacher-student collaboration and other teacher-directed activities.

During each interview at least 2 or 3 of the group were present. I had to work around class schedules to some extent and sometimes the nature of an excerpt made a smaller group more appropriate. To launch the work, Marj arranged for the whole group to be assembled and we reminisced about my original presence in their grade one classroom. I indicated how I hoped that they would be able to reflect on the tapes made then and interpret the

excerpts both from what they remembered and their current perspectives. We then proceeded to watch the first excerpt and subsequently they responded to open-ended questions from me building on each other's contributions.

(MON.JUNE10/91/TAPE 15.2):

Lynn: All right, now you've seen that little excerpt. Just tell me what you, uh, you remember from that... Like, what was happening?

Naom: Well, David was...

Rob: I don't know.

Naom: (Repeats) David was getting hyper about people looking at him. Why,...I don't know why David was hyper (Loud noise outside so Lynn gets up to close window).

Dav: I hate Jamie. He was looking at me.

Lynn: Do you remember why, David?...

Following the viewing of a tape, each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes. I would have them try to reconstruct what they saw, explain and clarify, and confirm or disconfirm what I thought I heard them saying. In addition, I did not discourage them from pursuing something that was triggered from the tape but not necessarily part of its content. In this way the interviews were not just about what they saw, but rather included other dimensions of the classroom structure, organization and setting. While I was interested in corroboration and/or questions about the patterns of collaboration and teacher interaction, I also wished to gain a retrospective of that whole classroom and tease out any interesting or different ways of looking at this. I believed this approach would help to deal with any previously existing hypertypification (Erikson, 1992) and reduce the chances that their contributions could be explained by memory of the previous interviews.

Following the interviews, the tapes were catalogued (Corsaro, 1979) and then transcribed by Rachel Zuckerman, a graduate student

and research assistant. Having weighed carefully the issues raised by Ochs (1979) regarding transcription theory, we decided on a traditional format which captured as much of the verbatim interaction exactly as it sounded, entering any paralinguistic features that would help with the analysis. I then reviewed the transcripts along with the videotapes in conjunction with the fieldnotes I had taken to frame the interviews. I added and/or modified the transcripts to make them as complete as possible.

In the preliminary fine-grained analysis I used an "open coding" approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to label the concepts in the interviews and then compared and contrasted these with the earlier interviews and the patterns that had emerged in the earlier study. This analysis revealed some very consistent, albeit increasingly sophisticated interpretations of the original data that could not be explained by memory of previous discussions. To further validate these findings, I arranged for Mrs. Phillips to review the tapes and then we collaboratively viewed the data and dialogued about it and the possible interpretations.

(THURS.FEB.18/93/DIALOGUE WITH MARJ):

Marj: The notion of children as researchers has become clearer. It says a lot about memory. From what I can gather, the children do know, almost intuitively, more than we are giving them credit for. They know more than what the classroom setting is about and through longterm memory this becomes entrenched....No, I don't think the questions are leading them...they have each other and they are scaffolding the past...they have to have a visual input, reflections are too vague.

It was this retropsective process which was predicated on having the original videotaped data and relatively easy access to more than half of the grade one children that permitted me to re-visit and analyze the data in a more axial way (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Their distance yet familiarity and maturity provided a

different lens for considering the data, suggesting other kinds of connections and emphases. It is to these findings that I shall now turn.

Friendship and audience in the peer world

In June 1987 through the interview process, the children had helped to validate 3 patterns of collaboration that had emerged in the data and the various roles that Marj Phillips took on during collaborative and teacher-directed activity. During the 1990 interviews, the children corroborated these patterns giving longer and somewhat more detailed interpretations. However, the essence of their responses did not vary. In what follows I will briefly outline and contextualize that corroboration illustrating that their earlier observations and explanations have held up over time and making the case, that children, even young ones, can play an important role in the research process. Then I will examine friendship and audience as a focus and show how these two concepts have emerged as being very important in the eyes of the children and perhaps ones to which we should give greater attention.

During what had been labelled as parallel collaborative events, (Butler-Kisber, 1988), the children worked on their own products but interacted at will with others, usually at their table clusters. They talked about many things including their work and they monitored what others were doing. This gave them choice in the amount and diversity of interaction and permitted them to use other ideas to build on their own if they wished. They percieved this as working together even though they produced individual products and often preferred this approach, particularly in pencil and paper tasks. The grade 6 group were able to corroborate these dimensions of parallel collaboration and to recall in detail how Marj allowed them to interact only intervening when things got "too loud or rambunctious" and how she either worked with individuals during these kind of events or moved around the room "giving ideas,

helping and complimenting".

MON. JUNE10/91/TAPE15.2:
[Video excerpt had shown 5 Gr.1 children working on drawing pictures on individual thank you letters to a teacher aid and an argument had occurred]

...Erin: I can just remember talking and just probably colouring...
...Lynn: There you were having a little bit of an argument...
...DavD: We were always arguing (everyone laughs)
Naom: Until today!
Erin: We just talked about what we were drawing and said, 'Oh, that's nice'.
...Kyle: Then, she wouldn't tell us to be quiet. Now, she (pause) the teachers are always telling us to be quiet.
...DavD: What your family's going to be doing if you're going to go away or something. Things that were going on in your life.
...Lynn: OK. Did you ever talk about what you were doing?
Children: (Naomi, Bonnie, Erin, Kyle, in unison) Yeah.
Rich: Um, very rarely in my case...I was probably off in another world.

When they examined "helping and sharing" and "creating/ brainstorming" events which had been categorized as joint collaboration, they remembered that this was when they worked with one or more peers on a joint task and/or product. They found this to be easier in the sense that they had more people to share in the work and potentially , "...you have more ideas and better things" (TUES.JUNE11/91/13.2/DAVID), but it was also was more difficult since they had to negotiate and agree on the ideas as well procedures for doing the task. They indicated in both these types of joint collaborative events that similarities existed. Both meant working together "when we, like, were sharing our journals, we were working together...telling each other what we thought..And in brainstorming, we tell each other what we think, about what you should write and everything."(MON.JUNE10/91/7.5/ERIN). They were able to highlight some differences between a brainstorming event and the creation of a puppet play indicating that while they were both assigned tasks, that a puppet play was "um, it's more in a

way, creative. Just a bit more because ...you're using your hand to talk...you have to think more before you can just blab it out." (TUES.JUNE11/91/9.1/BONNIE). I had concluded in the original study that puppet plays were both demanding and creative events (Butler-Kisber, 1988, 21-227). Again, they remembered and explained Marj's role during joint collaboration as that of facilitator.

When they talked about patterns of informal collaboration (which had been defined in the earlier study as when they got together in their spare time to work on more play-like tasks without any expectation that these had to be completed), they indicated that it was like "a break from all the school work you had been doing...like hanging out together...we were probably all friends..." (TUES.JUNE11/91/5.6/RICHARD/DAVID). It was during this discussion that the underlying rules of safety, "no violence" and consideration for others were elicited and the notion that, although informal collaboration was like play, and more movement was tolerated, the classroom was the boundary for this kind of activity. All of these notions were congruent with the results of the study.

They remembered clearly how Marj prepared them for the day at hand, "...she was ,um, well, not really teaching but she was sort of...sort of like telling us what's going to happen in the day." (TUES.JUNE11/91/17.1/BONNIE); directed and orchestrated them, "...it's sort of like a graph, how to learn how to make a graph...uh, or just a little table of what people have...teaching everybody to find out how many people have lollipops..." (MON.JUNE10/91/1.1/ERIN); conferenced quite publically, "...But she would sometimes tell the kids, `go back to your seats a second, I'll call you up,' but usually, you could hear what she was saying," (MON.JUNE10/91/15.7/NAOMI); and listened to them in events in which I had concluded her role was that of more capable peer, "...We just really had a discussion about different things, different topics that came to mind," ..."Ya, she liked to

listen"..."And she said, `Oh what fun, or put it into a journal"...(MON.JUNE11/91/12.1/NAOMI/DAVID/ERIN). They were also able to talk about how she made sure that everyone got a chance to participate, "...We all,like, everyone did a play at least once." (TUES.JUNE11/91/17.1/DAVID) I postulated in the earlier work that it was these patterns of collaboration, the roles that Marj played and the open, trusting and participative organization in this classroom that made it such a collaborative environment.

In the early interviews with the children the theme of friendship was a recurring one. They indicated that they sat with friends (Marj allowed them to choose their seats on the first day), they preferred working with friends and felt they did better work as a result:

(JUNE 16/87/9.2/GR.1):

...David: Like Erin said, she said if you got a best friend like they always agree on things. Well, how they agree is because if they're really best friends and they like to play and chat and stuff, they don't want to try and come apart and be bad for them and so they just agree on it and don't have arguments.

...Rich: And because and also because of from what David said,it's also because if you're friends then they think pretty well the same so.

...Naom: Like if (pause) getting into argument and them sometimes you don't talk to each other for a little while...we figure out how dumb it is not to talk to each if you're really best friends inside...So we just talk it over and then we finally, we get back together again.

I had concluded that friendship was particularly important from the perpspective of the children and that it was a good way of fostering peer collaboration but that it should be balanced with other kinds of partnerships. I hypothesized that this would help to widen friendships and perhaps help to prevent the cliques that form in the later elementary years (Garnica, 1981). This foreshadowed what turned out to be two strong themes which emerged in the

retrospective interviews, that of friendship and the reciprocal dimension of audience.

LeCompte and Preissle (1992, 823) indicate that:

> Younger children conceptualize school experience as types of activity and the structures that support them. Older students shift their attention from structures, tasks and schedules to relationships with people.

What this longitudinal data seems to suggest is that friendship is a structure that supports activity. It was fostered in this collaborative classroom where children were given the opportunity to sit beside and work frequently with their friends. Even in grade one they were able to talk about the benefits of working with friends; the shared understandings, the ability to negotiate and solve disputes quickly. Given the opportunity to work with friends seemed to have helped them understand and express their knowledge about these relationships even at age six.

The retrospective interviews illustrated that while relationships may have become even more interesting to them at age 12, the excerpts from the tapes elicited comments again and again throughout our discussions which emphasized how the important the role of friendship was in grade one and how well they remembered this. These early friendships continued to have an impact on their interaction. They were now able to explain that friendship supported their activity not only because of shared interest but also because it created a comfortable atmosphere:

(TUES.JUNE11/91/9.1/ERIN/BONNIE/NAOMI):

...Lynn: ...How would it have been if you had been with someone who wasn't one of your closer friends...Would you have had a play?
Erin: I don't think it would have happened.
Naom: I don't think it would have but if it did, I don't think I'd feel as comfortable talking to them and

telling them my ideas. `Cause, like, even `till today, I can tell the other of those people here...my ideas and they'll say, `That's a good idea. Let's use it." If they don't like it, then they'll say, `Well, how about we do this instead?'...Or if you're not even with your friends at all, like I personally, I don't feel comfortable really...

(MON.JUNE10/91/9.2/RICHARD):
[Excerpt from video about Richard and Jamie jointly preparing a play they were to present to the class]
...Rich: I remember the atmosphere of the story 'cause I was with Jamie and I liked the art thing I did.

The emphasis on atmosphere was coupled with the importance of audience as a support system.

(MON.JUNE11/91/1.1/BONNIE/ERIN):
[Excerpt from a video about a class discussion on a topic]
...Bonn: This one, you're sort of like, um, not really blabbing out but, um, you let all your feelings into your speech and it goes out.
...Erin: Um, well, in our groups I guess you feel more open 'cause it, you know these people better 'cause they're people in your group (that is at the table clusters) and you always talk to them. Like, I was really shy when I was talking 'cause it was everybody in the class and everybody was watching me.

(TUES.JUNE11/91/11.4/RICHARD/BONNIE/ERIN):
[Excerpt from a video of Bonnie reading to the class a story she had written]
...Lynn:...What about the children sitting with Mrs. Phillips?
...What was their role in this whole thing?
Rich: To listen.
...Bonn: Audience, sort of.
...Erin: Gives her support like in the plays...'Cause she's reading a story to the class...And, um, like the reaction on their face and everything would be, like, supporting to her.

From this retrospective point of view, the children were also able to indicate that while they preferred to work with same gender friends for the most part, that they did have some opposite gender friends until grade two or three.

What all of this seems to suggest, at least from a Western

perspective, is that there are qualitative differences that occur during classroom collaborative events with friends which have an impact on what transpires and the potential outcome. It is more than just the shared understandings that makes the generation of ideas and negotiation easier. It is the atmosphere and comfort level in the audience of friends that help to foster risk-taking, making the work easier, faster and possibly more creative and from a Vygotskian (1978) perspective this has implications for both the quantity and quality of learning. This type of collaboration is not restricted to joint efforts but can be a part of individual work when it is surrounded by peers who are friends in a context where talk is both allowed and encouraged.

This suggests that there should be a naturalness rather than a prescribed nature to collaborative events which is certainly not what one generally associates with "co-operative learning activities." In addition, there appears to be a need to delineate all the various ways that early friendships are initiated, developed and maintained so that isolation can be prevented. It also speaks to the need to develop and encourage cross-gender friendships in the very early grades when there seems to be a far greater openness to this on the part of the children. Perhaps if we start early on to generate friendships for collaboration rather than the reverse, we may be able to provide genuine access and equity for all learners.

Implications

The grade 6 children in this retrospective study corroborated and expanded upon the patterns of collaboration, the roles the teacher played and the structure and organization while reviewing videotaped events they had helped to interpret 5 years previously. Their corroboration was such that it could not be attributed to memory of the taped events since the videotaped excerpts often triggered explanations and memories of the classroom that were not

a part of the immediate event but were consistent with patterns that were a part of the original study. They also repeatedly re-iterated their understandings of that classroom at different times and in varying ways in response to the 18 videotaped excerpts.

The results of this retrospective study illustrate that:

1. Children can be excellent contributors to the research process even at a very young age. In fact, rather than having them participate in validation of interpretations, we might consider involving them in framing and directing questions right from the beginning. Their leads and lenses could point us in different directions which may be more important and illuminating. And action research, or whatever we wish to call that research which seeks to empower those who are studied and change educational practice, has ethical and practical reasons for including students in the process.

2. Videotaped data provide a wonderful way of re-visiting data and sharing and interpreting with participants in a study. In fact group responses to this type of data scaffolds memories and interpretations and produces richer results. For teacher-as-researcher work, videotape is probably one of the answers for dealing with the demands of simultaneous teaching and data collecting. There is also the potential of marrying the use of videotape with approaches to portfolio assessment. Samples of dynamic activity coupled with the more static artifacts would add another dimension to evaluation.

3. Finally, more examples of including children in research from the onset and detailed descriptions of how this can be done need to be shared so that approaches can become more sophisticated and useful.

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